# Castlemaine Naturalist

October 2016

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**Monthly newsletter of the Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.**

Major Mitchell Cockatoo - photo Nigel Harland

## To the Nullarbor and Back

Nigel Harland

It's funny what birdwatchers do sometimes, some people would not use the word funny. Recently the birding Powers That Be decided to create three new species by splitting off birds of an existing species which live in a certain area and have allegedly different characteristics. An example of this is the Golden Whistler. A short time ago this was split into two, by creating the Western Whistler, a subspecies which lives in Western Australia. I have seen both and I cannot detect any difference at all. Anyway, it gives me another tick! The opposite of splitting is called lumping, when similar birds which used to have a separate name are "lumped" back together. This gives me less pleasure, since I have to untick the bird. However it does not mean that I have to go and unsee it!

Two very good birding friends of mine, Dougald, Tom and I decided to travel to the Nullarbor to twitch three recent splits. These were the Copperback Quail-thrush, the Nullarbor Quail-thrush and the Naretha Bluebonnet. Much serious planning was put into the trip and we set out on 23rd August. I met them in Mildura and we set off in a westerly direction. We have a competition as to who can guess the total number of species that we will see on the trip. Tom's guess was a pessimistic 128, mine was 143 and Dougald was the optimist this time with 172.

We travelled through Waikerie, Port Augusta to a town called Kimba. We stayed at the pub and the licensee knew of a local landholder who had to drive slowly when taking his kids to school to avoid the thousands(!) of Copperback Quail-thrushes on the track. We made contact with him, had a nice meal and set off early for a guaranteed sighting. We found the location and simply waited till they appeared. The word "guaranteed" in birdwatching is not quite as definitive as it is in general use. We waited for a long time, met the owner, who found it most strange and looked in different sites. Dougald went back for the car while Tom and I kept searching. Lo and behold, Dougald nearly ran one over on his way back. Of course when he took Tom and I back to the site, it had long gone. I managed to catch a brief glimpse of one, but again failed to find it so that Tom could have a

view. It was time to move on despite the dip for Tom and my desire for a better view.

The next destination was Venus Bay on the western coast of the Eyre Peninsula. The reason for this was that a North American bird, a Laughing Gull, had been seen at the Caravan Park in town. We arrived there, checked in and asked about the Gull. We were told to walk a few metres into the park. Lo and behold, there it was, just sitting in the middle of a mob of Silver Gulls, waiting to be fed. It had been there since May and had attracted over 80 birdwatchers, providing substantial income to the owners. This was a tick for Tom, but Dougald and I had seen one in Cairns several years ago.

Next stop was the Nullarbor Roadhouse, which was quite a long drive. I managed to introduce Tom and Dougald to the sport of Geocaching. Without going into too much detail, people hide things in difficult places and you use an app you download onto your mobile phone, which tells you roughly where each one is together with a few clues. You then use your phone to direct you towards it. I am now hooked, and by the end of the trip we found fifteen – five each, many on the Eyre Highway across the Nullarbor.

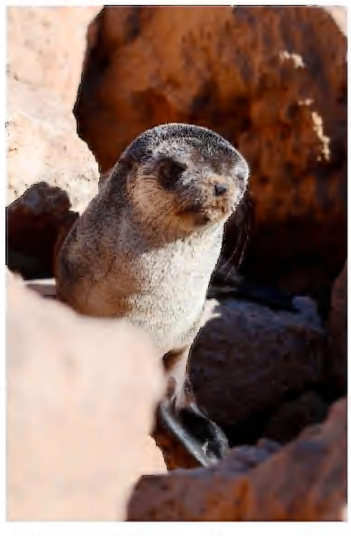
Anyway we arrived at the Roadhouse and set off for the Nullarbor Quail-thrush. This was nowhere near as hard and we saw a pair on the track ahead of us in no time at all. We continued along the track and eventually saw eight different birds. Tick! This area was also a good sight for the Hairy-nosed Wombat and we found many burrows. An evening stakeout failed to deliver as did a second visit on our way home.

We had previously arranged a visit to the Eyre Bird Observatory, near Cocklebiddy, so the next stop was a point on the road to the Observatory. You need serious four wheel drive to travel the last fifteen kilometres, so we arranged to be picked up. None of us had been there before and it proved to be a memorable visit. The place is looked after by caretakers who stay for three months at a time. They are not necessarily keen birdwatchers, but certainly know the area and know how to look after guests. There are many walking tracks around the Observatory, which we took advantage of and Ron took us in a four wheel drive along the beach. A highlight of that was a Great Crested Grebe in the ocean, something we had not seen before. Another spectacular sight was a flock of Major Mitchell Cockatoos which came in for water most evenings. I have seen Major Mitchells before, but never in such numbers and so close. The Observatory is certainly a place I would thoroughly recommend to anyone driving across the Nullarbor, but remember you do have to book.

There was a possibility of finding a Copperback Quail-thrush there, but the caretakers had never seen one. On our last day, we decided to walk out and arrange for Ron to drive out some three hours later with our belongings. We arrived at the 4km mark and heard the call, but a search revealed nothing. Another kilometre further and Dougald sighted a bird crossing the track which was definitely Quail-thrush like. It appeared again close to the track and we all saw it well. There

was another bird on the other side of the track which gave us remarkable views. Unfortunately no camera, but the sighting will remain in my head forever. Ron picked us up and took us back to the car where we drove on to Cocklebiddy ready for the final stage of the finely tuned operation. The quest for the Naretha Bluebonnet.

The Naretha Bluebonnet has a very small range in Western Australia, inland and roughly 100km north of Cocklebiddy. On a sealed road, this would be an hour's drive. However, the estimate on this road was perhaps four hours. Having arrived at Cocklebiddy, we checked in and decided to travel half way along the road to see what the conditions were like. Things weren't too bad, so we headed home. There were several gates to open and at one of them I got out to open it and close it behind us. Having got back into the car, Dougald headed off slowly and before we had travelled 5m, we had a puncture. In no time at all, the spare was put on and we made our way cautiously back to Cocklebiddy to pick up a new tyre. You would think that garages in the middle of the Nullarbor would carry spare tyres, but no, they didn't have any! They suggested we try the next roadhouse, so early next morning we set out with hope that was soon dashed. We would have to go to Eucla to have any hope, by which time it would be too late to go back. So, no Naretha Bluebonnet this time.



We drove back to see Chuckles again, then on to Port Lincoln, a part of the Eyre Peninsula that I had not seen before. Our main aim was the Rock Parrot, which we failed to find. However, we were alerted to some Australian Fur Seals which we soon tracked down. The one shown is a juvenile, but could certainly make a noise when disturbed for photography.

So we headed home and we saw 169 species on the trip, meaning that Dougald won the ice cream prize. A return visit for the Bluebonnet is already being planned – watch this space.

# **October Observations - (1946 version)**

George Broadway

"Wildlife" was a nature-themed magazine edited by P. Crosbie Morrison, published during the war years and until the fifties. I find it interesting to look at specimens sent in by readers, and in this case to see what had turned up in October 1946.

First however, an aside. As a young teacher in Sunraysia in the sixties I had the good fortune to spend time in the bush with the celebrated naturalist L.G. Chandler who was a first world war soldier settler at RedCliffs. I admired his magnificent bird photographs and thought he must have a really great camera. What was my surprise when I found that the camera he was then using was exactly the same model as mine. No self-focussing or built-in metering in those days or long lenses.

I was interested to find in the October Wildlife an article written by Les about the South-West of the state, in particular the Glenelg River, in which he maintained that the area should be preserved and not developed. Happily the area is now a National Park. One paragraph I found particularly interesting, I quote. "Here was one of the few spots in Victoria where kangaroos are still sufficiently plentiful to constitute a menace to the grazier - most residents of Victoria have never seen a wild kangaroo on his native heath and with settlement and clearing the sight will be even rarer to the coming generation".

I believe Les would have lived long enough to see kangaroos reach plague proportions in the Mallee, placing the native pines at risk of extinction had the Field Nats not erected enclosures to protect young seedlings.

Back to Notes and Specimens from Readers; first, insects.

A Dragonfly without its abdomen, probably bitten off by a bird. Comments that such a dragonfly can survive for a while although it would have difficulty balancing. If replaced by a matchstick it would be able to fly quite well.

An insect sent with beetroot leaves was not the one which had eaten them. It was an ichneumon wasp, and it had probably eaten the true culprit.

Two readers sent in small case-moth cocoons. Male small with orange patches on wings; female with shrivelled wings of a brilliant blue which are never used. Females never leave the case.

Some specimens of the chrysalis of Cabbage White Butterfly, some of which contained grubs of a parasitic wasp.

Paragryllacris, or Tree Cricket, one of the Long-horned Grasshoppers. Lives under bark and feeds on grubs.

Katydid; another of the Grasshopper group with wings resembling a gum-leaf which it feeds on. Not normally in sufficient numbers to cause a problem.

Several spiders: including a Red-headed Trapdoor Spider, A Nephila, Long-tailed Spider, *Arachnura higginsii*, assumes the stance of a scorpion as a bluff, but is harmless.

The little Spiny Spider, *Gasteracantha minax*, spins a communal web.

I gather several bird photos were sent in for identification, these included :-

White-plumed Honeyeater, said to be the most common honeyeater in Melbourne, Red Wattlebird, Dusky Moorhen, White-fronted Heron.

Canaries acting as foster-parents to young Goldfinches. The two species are closely related and will sometimes interbreed.

Small plants from near Melbourne were Helmet Orchids, *Corybas* sp, one of the earliest Spring orchids in the Melbourne area.

One reader reported having an apricot tree attacked by a mistletoe, unidentified. Would it most likely have been Creeping Mistletoe, often seen on introduced trees around Melbourne?

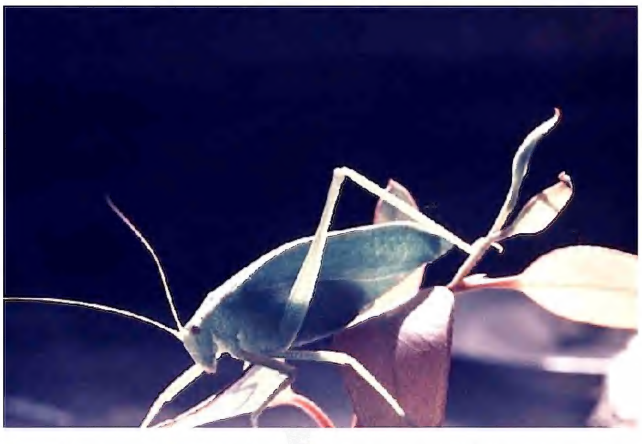
A tiny white egg was a puzzle, too small for any Australian bird and calcification ruled it out as belonging to a lizard. However not so the little soft-bodied Gecko, which does lay calcified eggs.

There was a specimen of the Fat-tailed Pouched Mouse, feeding mainly on grubs and other insect pests and therefore a friend to the farmer. The teeth show the difference to the ordinary house mouse.

On the other hand a specimen of the Black Rat, *Rattus rattus*, more of a vegetarian than the Norwegian or sewer rat. It infests gardens rather than houses. (Could it be the one which has been stealing our vegies?)

Honey-water mix left for bees, bees found lying about apparently dead. Answer: the mix had probably fermented and the bees were not dead but intoxicated. Similarly a lorikeet found in a similar state had most likely been sipping nectar from older flowers which had fermented.

Betty from Gippsland had found a yellow worm with a dark streak and very slimy. It was a Planarian or "Tiger Worm" without rings on the body like an earthworm. It is a more primitive animal than an earthworm but preys on them which is one reason why they are called "Tiger Worms".



Above left: Katydid

Above: Tree Cricket

Left: Planarian worms, two types

# Wednesday Evening Wildflower Walks

Noel Young

Walk 1 was cancelled as it was raining at the time.

**Walk 2 on Sept. 21 was led by Geraldine to Youngmans' track**, where we found a dense show of early wildflowers, including Leopard Orchids, Pink Fingers, Early Nancy, Gorse Bitter-pea, and an amazing spread of Tall Sundew, many flowering. We also found patches of Gnat Orchids, Nodding Greenhoods and Goldfields Grevillea in flower. On later examination one of my photos of the Gnat Orchid showed a tiny fly resting on the tongue - very likely the pollinator.

Top- Goldfields Grevillea and Pink Fingers
Left- Gnat Orchid with tiny Fly on tongue
- enlargement above

Facing page - Castlemaine Spider orchids; Leopard Orchid; Bluebeard Orchid.

- All photos by Noel Young

**Walk 3 on Sept. 28 was led by George to the Monk.**

Billy buttons, Early Nancy, Gorse Bitter-pea and Waxlip Orchids were prolific. More scattered were Pink Fingers, Pink Bells, Creamy candles, Leopard Orchids, Slender Rice-flower, Downy Grevillea, and occasionally Primrose Goodenia, Yam Daisy, Tall Sundew, Fairy Waxflower, White Marianth and Twining Fringe-lily. At the first track junction a small Hill Flat-pea (*Platylobium montanum*) was in flower, and someone found a tall Greenhood, and later Dwarf Greenhoods. Plants showing buds included Sticky Everlasting, Grey Everlasting, Bulbine Lily, Millotia and Daphne Heath. But the highlight of the visit was over 20 **Castlemaine Spider** Orchids, (*Caladenia clavescens*) and the rare **Bluebeard** (*Pheladenia deformis*).

## **Mystery Bird** – Nigel Harland

The bird shown last month was the Glossy Ibis. There are three Ibises found in Australia, the other two being the White Ibis and Straw-necked Ibis and many more world-wide. The latter two are certainly found in our district and can be regularly seen in marshy areas or open paddocks. The Glossy Ibis is more of a migratory species and generally fairly rare in Australia, although it is widespread in Europe Asia and Africa. The photo shows its "glossiness" and you may notice that it is slightly smaller than its two cousins.

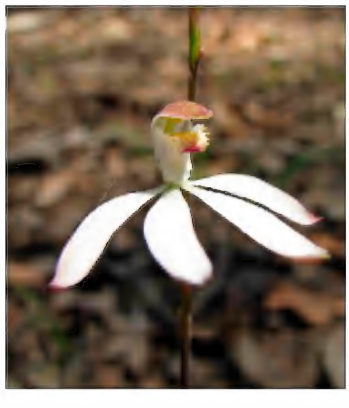
## **Is it a Hooded or Musky Caladenia?** -- Geraldine Harris

The Hooded Caladenia and Musky Caladenia have similarities. Both are common. Here are a few clues to deciphering one from the other.

Hooded Caladenia *Caladenia cucullata* cucullata = hooded

- 25 cm tall, up to 6 small hooded flowers, September to November
- petals and sepals have white interiors, and exteriors covered with numerous green to brownish glandular hairs
- dorsal sepal is sharply bent over
- mostly white labellum has dark purple calli and dark purple tip

Musky Caladenia *Caladenia gracilis* gracilis = slender, graceful appearance



Common name refers to the musky odour emitted by the flowers on a warm day.

- 45 cm tall , up to 6 small musk-scented flowers, August to January
- petals and sepals have white interiors, and exteriors covered with numerous red to brownish glandular hairs
- dorsal sepal is gently curved over the labellum
- mostly white labellum has yellow/red calli and pink tip.

So basically:

the Hooded Caladenia is distinguished by strongly hooded flowers with dark red/purple calli and labellum tip.

the Musky Caladenia has a musky odour, a much less sharply bent dorsal sepal, and the labellum has a much paler pink tip.

Ref:

Perkins E. 2016, *Plants of Castlemaine District.*
Backhouse G & Jeanes J. 2006, W*ild Orchids* of Victoria Australia, RH Kuiter, Czech Republic

Please note that the deadline for articles for the November issue is October 28.
- ED

## Bird and Plant Quiz October

Nigel Harland

Geraldine Harris

## Planned burns and wildflowers

Peter Turner

On September 7th Paul Bates (District Manager, Murray Goldfields District, DELWP) and Alison Jeavons (DELWP) were joined by CFNC Committee members Richard, George and Peter on a tour of some areas around Castlemaine that CFNC members value for wildflowers, to assess the impacts, or potential impacts, of planned burns.

We stopped first on Centre Track in the Wattle Flat State Forests, where Paul described how the fire risk of woodlands is assessed, taking into account the litter at ground level, the low and high level shrub densities and the type and density of trees – Stringy barks are a particularly high risk, because the fine shreds of bark can spread fire rapidly. While this area is close to the town – and the "baco" – it may not need a planned burn for some time. Paul showed us the handbook that describes the risk assessment process. Detailed risk assessments will be carried out soon. We then moved to Youngmans Track, where CFNC has conducted detailed surveys in the past. In an area that was burnt a few years ago, the new growth of wildflowers was encouraging.

The next stop was at the Forest Creek Tourist Mine park, where DELWP has recently mulched areas of gorse, rather than conducting a controlled burn. While mulching requires follow-up action, Paul is hoping that it can be used widely close to settlements, to reduce the smoke hazard that can be damaging to health.

Along the Poverty Gully Track we were able to compare a recently burnt area on one side with unburned bush on the other. On Jacobs Track east of The Monk an area burnt about 10 years ago has recovered well after this years winter rain. We inspected the "ecological thinning" carried out by Parks Vic. along Morgans Track, and noted the need to find out about ongoing monitoring of the impacts.

The last areas visited were along the Old Fire Tower Track, Fryers Ridge Road and the cutting at the top of the Old Coach Road, where we were all delighted with the richness of the wildflowers. Richard and George – long familiar with these special places – could emphasize the importance of minimizing the impact of major fire damage. At the site of the old Fire Tower, Paul pointed out the area on the eastern

slope where lightning had started a fire some years ago, but where a previous planned burn on the western slope prevented a major fire. He had shown CFNC members this example during his talk to the club in June.

Paul and Alison welcomed this opportunity to learn about the knowledge CFNC members have about the natural values of the woodlands in our area, and encouraged us to keep DELWP informed of our surveys and observations. We all agreed that the rain this winter has had a wonderful impact on the bush, bringing a rich array of wildflowers back to areas that during the drought years had been slow to recover after impact by fire.

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Plants listed by Richard Piesse on the above excursion - Wattle Flat, areas south of Poverty Gully channel and Fryers Ridge. September 7. Most were sighted on the Fryers Ridge road and in the cutting on Old Coach road above Taradale.

*Wurmbea dioica* *Luzula meridionalis* *Caladenia carnea*
*Diuris pardina* *Pterostylis smaragdyna* *Craspedia variabilis*
*Microseris lanceolata* *Stackhousia monogyna* (buds) *Hibbertia fasciculata*
*Drosera auriculata* *Drosera abberans* *Tetratheca ciliata*
*Leucopogon ericoides* *Leucopogon fletcheri* *Leucopogon virgatus*
*Acacia acinacea* *Acacia aspera* *Acacia baileyana*
*Acacia dealbata* *Acacia decurrens* *Acacia genistifolia*
*Acacia lanigera* *Acacia oxycedrus* *Acacia paradoxa*
*Acacia provincialis* *Acacia pycnantha* *Acacia sporadica*
*Acacia melanoxylon* *Acacia mitchellii* (last seasons pods)
*Daviesia ulicifolia* *Dillwynia cinerascens* *Hardenbergia violacea*
*Hovea linearis* *Platylobium montanum* ssp *montanum*
*Goodenia blackiana* *Eucalyptus polyanthemos* *Rhytidosporum procumbens*
*Comesperma ericinum* (buds) *Grevillea alpina* *Philotheca verrucosa*
*Pimelea humilis* *Epacris impressa*

## **Plants flowering on other walks in September** - Richard Piesse

### 1 A walk in Dead Horse Gully 14/9

*Caladenia carnea* *Diuris pardina* *Stackhousia monogyna*
*Drosera auriculata* *Tetratheca ciliata* *Pimelea humilis*
*Acacia acinacea; aspera; genistifolia; pycnantha* *Daviesia ulicifolia*
*Hardenbergia violacea* *Cassytha melantha* *Eucalyptus polyanthemos*
*Rhytidosporum procumbens* *Philotheca verrucosa*

### 2 Fryerstown / Irishtown walk 18/9

*Wurmbea dioica* *Caladenia carnea; phaeoclavia*
*Diuris pardina* *Pterostylis nutans* *Luzula meridionalis*
*Microseris lanceolata* *Stackhousia monogyna* *Drosera aberrans; auriculata*
*Tetratheca ciliata* *Acacia acinacea; aspera; genistifolia; provincialis; pycnantha*
*Dillwynia cinerascens* *Hovea linearis* *Eucalyptus polyanthemos*
*Rhytidosporum procumbens* *Grevillea alpina* *Hakea decurrens*
*Philotheca verrucosa* *Pimelea linifolia* *Goodenia blackiana*
*Boronia anemonifolia**

3 Kalimna Park 21/9

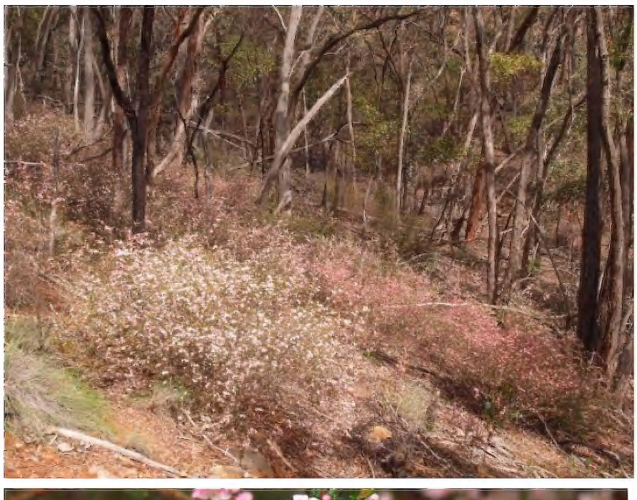
*Wurmbea dioica* *Hypoxis glabella* *Luzula meridionalis*
*Caladenia carnea; clavescens* *Diuris pardina*
*Glossodia major** (280 counted along 300m of track just east of the tourist road)
*Craspedia variabilis* *Microseris lanceolata* *Stackhousia monogyna*
*Drosera auriculata* *Tetratheca ciliata* *Pimelea linifolia*
*Acacia acinacea; aspera; genistifolia; paradoxa; pycnantha*
*Daviesia leptophylla; ulicifolia* *Hardenbergia violacea* *Goodenia blackiana*
*Grevillea alpina* *Philotheca verrucosa* *Rhytidosporum procumbens*

## Eucalyptus field guide

A number of members attended the launch of FOBIF's guide to the Eucalypts of the Mt. Alexander Region on Saturday 24th September. Compiled by Bernard Slattery, Ern Perkins and Bronwyn Silver, this excellent publication was well worth the wait, and well worth the modest cost. All but the rarer species are covered, with high quality illustrations and descriptions of the details needed for identification. Highly recommended. Further details on the FOBIF website.

## Photo observations - Boronia patch, Irishtown

The copious rainfall this spring is working wonders for our wildflower season, so although It is several years since I visited the "boronia patch" a tip from Richard had me off with the cameras in search of the pink blossoms. Shrubs covered with flowers extend over a considerable area of the gully and should be 'on the go' for a while yet. - Noel Young



**Disclaimer:** The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club

# Castlemaine Field Naturalists
## Coming events

**Fri Oct. 14 meeting:** speaker PETER TURNER - Birding in the top end

**Sat Oct. 15 field trip:** spring flowers, Fryers ridge

**Fri Nov. 11 meeting:** speaker MARILYN HEWISH - Moths

**Sat Nov. 19** Roadside cleanup

**Fri Dec. 9** Members night - break-up

### VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB ACTIVITIES

**General meetings -** (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) Hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 7.30 pm.

**Field Trips -** (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the car park opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO morning and/or afternoon tea. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.

**Business meetings** - third Thursday of each month, except December, at George Broadways; 24a Greenhill Ave., at 6.00 pm. Members are invited to attend.

**Club website** (Web master: Chris Timewell) - http://castlemainefnc.wordpress.com/

**Subscriptions for 2016**
Ordinary membership: Single $30, Family $40
Pensioner or student: Single $25, Family $30
Subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

**2016 Committee**

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